



UNITED STATES ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY

REGION 8, MONTANA OFFICE
FEDERAL BUILDING, 10 West 15th Street, Suite 3200
HELENA, MONTANA 59626

Ref: 8MO

April 30, 2008

Craig Genzlinger, P.E.
Operations Engineer
Montana Division, Federal Highway Administration
2880 Skyway Drive
Helena, Montana 59602

and

Mr. Tom Martin, Chief
Environmental Services Bureau
Montana Dept. of Transportation
2701 Prospect Ave., P.O. Box 201001
Helena, MT 59620-1001

Re: CEQ # 20080127; U.S. Highway 93,
Ninepipe/Ronan Improvement Project, Final
Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement

Dear Mr. Genzlinger and Mr. Martin:

The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Region VIII Montana Office has reviewed the Final Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement (FSEIS) for the U.S. Highway 93 Ninepipe/Ronan Improvement Project, in accordance with our responsibilities under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and Section 309 of the Clean Air Act.

The EPA appreciates receipt of responses to agency comments on the draft SEIS. We commend the Federal Highway Administration, Montana Department of Transportation, and Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribe for evaluating and considering environmental impacts along with many safety and traffic operational factors and trade-offs during development of the preferred alternative to improve U.S. 93 in the Ninepipe and Ronan area, including the sensitive Ninepipe National Wildlife Refuge.

We are pleased that the preferred alternative through the rural portion of the project, Rural Alternative 3, is largely a two-lane design that will avoid or minimize many direct and indirect environmental effects. We are also pleased with the inclusion of a separated bicycle/pedestrian path in this alternative, and the proposals to increase bridge lengths, add culverts and increase culvert sizes at major stream and wetland crossings to improve hydrologic



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connections, flood capacity, fish passage, wetland functioning and to provide improved opportunities for wildlife crossings. In addition, we appreciate the many proposed measures that would reduce impacts to water quality, fisheries, and aquatic habitat (e.g., erosion control BMPs, SWPPP, and stormwater treatment, timing restrictions for in-channel construction work would avoid impacts to spawning fish, wetland avoidance and minimization measures, etc.). We support your selection of Rural Alternative 3 as the preferred alternative for the rural portion of the proposed project.

We also support your selection of Ronan Alternative 4 as the preferred alternative for the urban portion of the project through the City of Ronan. We are pleased that the preferred alternative through Ronan, involving a couplet configuration with a two-lane, one-way northbound route on US 93 and two lane, one-way southbound route on First Avenue SW, includes a pedestrian/bicycle pathway, and will provide open channel flow for Ronan Spring Creek, which currently flows in a culvert between First Avenue SE and US 93.

Thank you for the opportunity to review and offer EIS comments during the NEPA process. If you have any questions please contact Mr. Steve Potts of my staff in Helena at (406) 457-5022 or in Missoula at (406) 329-3313. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

/s/ Julie Dalsoglio
For John F. Wardell
Director
Montana Office

cc: Larry Svoboda/Julia Johnson, EPA, 8EPA-N, Denver